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BULLETIN

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1912

CONTENTS

1912

January.....	MISCELLANEOUS
March.....	MISCELLANEOUS
May.....	MISCELLANEOUS
July.....	PROCEEDINGS OF THE OTTAWA CONFERENCE
September.....	HANDBOOK, 1912
November.....	MISCELLANEOUS

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CONTENTS

EDUCATIONAL UNITY
EXECUTIVE BOARD
PUBLISHING BOARD
LIVERPOOL CONFERENCE
OTTAWA CONFERENCE

COLLEGE LIBRARIANS AT 1912 CONFERENCE

COUNCIL
COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIANS
LIBRARY SCHOOL FACULTIES
LEAGUE OF LIBRARY COMMISSIONS
EXPERIMENT IN CO-OPERATIVE PRINTING
NOTES AND NEWS

EDUCATIONAL UNITY*

By Walter L. Brown

Librarian Buffalo Public Library

The increasing practice of urging a large number of citizens to analyze intelligently the city budget is bound to make, not only for economy but for the good of the municipal service.

It will, without doubt, raise many questions as to the need of the different appropriations, as to whether each brings full value in return, and as to whether the same result might not be obtained by more economical means. It is well that such questions should be raised, as few years go by without placing in the city budget an appropriation for the establishment of some new and worthy means for the education or for the pleasure of its citizens. If this new venture proves successful, it remains a fixed, or more likely an increasing, charge for future years.

We believe that there are few cities, if any, whose budget will not show economic waste in the conduct of schemes of this character, but we wish to call attention only to a single group made up of the items appropriated for educational institutions which are available for the use of adult residents. Many such appropriations go to

institutions or activities established by private societies, the management of which, together with their plants and collections, have been turned over wholly, or in part, to the city for the use of the general public. These varied means of education, therefore, have not been established through the initiative of the city as a part of a definite plan, but have been brought about by the enthusiasm of some individual or some small group of citizens who realized a need in the city's social life.

Each institution carries on its work, for the most part, in an independent way, without connection or affiliation with any other. The only thing in common with them all is that their support, or a part of it, comes from the city's treasury. This is not only quite apt, but almost certain to mean a considerable amount of waste through duplication of labor, waste of material and of administrative effort, to say nothing of the possible loss of influence and of force.

Buffalo is, doubtless, in this respect a typical city. Appropriations are made annually in its budget for the support, or the partial support, of a public circulating library and its branches, a reference library, night schools, a natural science museum,

*Paper prepared for the meeting of the A. L. A. Council, Chicago, January 5th, 1912, and printed at request of the Council.